

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal  
CONDUCTED BY  
CHARLES DICKENS

NO. 915. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 1886.

PRICE TWOPENCE

## ALEXIA.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE,

Author of "Gerald."

### CHAPTER VIII.

CHARLIE'S mother had no intention of living at Redwood, now that he was married. She thought that the young people, whether they stayed there or not, would get on much better without her interference. She and Charlie had never understood each other particularly well, and as Alexia had shrewdly guessed, she disagreed with her daughter-in-law on almost all points. Still they were all very civil to each other, and Mrs. Melville was staying on at Redwood through the summer weeks, intending by and by to go to the sea, and afterwards to settle in London for the winter.

Very soon after that wet day, when the weather was hot and dry again, Mrs. Melville was walking alone in the park, and saw Mrs. Dodd coming to meet her. Without caring much for Mrs. Dodd, Mrs. Melville always thought her a satisfactory clergyman's wife. She dressed plainly and sensibly, and her opinions about poor people were to be relied upon. She did what she believed to be her duty, and one cannot say that of everybody. Advancing from the broad, dazzling sunshine into the shadow of the elms, where Mrs. Melville was walking, Mrs. Dodd, in her cool fresh dress, was quite a pleasant sight; her cheeks were rosy, and there was an agreeable brightness in her eyes. Mrs. Melville went forward to meet her with rather more friendliness than usual. Since she had given up the reins to Maud, she felt more and more as if everything and everybody at Redwood belonged to her.

"And have you heard the news?" said Mrs. Dodd.

"No, indeed. What is it? Another wedding?"

"Well, I don't know about the wedding. That will be put off for some time, I fancy. He is so young, and has nothing at present. But Alice Page—"

"Alice Page! Alexia, do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Melville, very much interested. "Is it possible! Dear me, I am very glad to hear that. But who is he? Somebody good enough for her, I do hope."

"Oh, quite—quite good enough," said Mrs. Dodd, a little surprised. "That nice-looking boy who has been staying with them—her cousin, Edmund Rowley."

"Really! Well, I heard some hint of that, but I thought there was nothing in it."

"I had my suspicions," said Mrs. Dodd, with a wise smile; "I found them together once or twice in the garden. However, I don't think anybody knows yet. I happened to meet Mr. Page just now, and I asked him as a friend, you know, if there was anything in it, and he acknowledged that it was a settled thing."

"Dear me! That boy!" said Mrs. Melville, and she almost sighed, and poked absently in the grass with her parasol.

"He is a very intelligent young man," said Mrs. Dodd, "getting on well at Oxford, I hear. He has some thoughts of taking orders. I don't quite know what sort of clergyman's wife Alice Page will make."

"She will do very well. She is clever enough for anything," said Mrs. Melville.

"Ah—clever, certainly, but—" hesitated Mrs. Dodd. "However, I think it is decidedly a good thing. A girl like that wants an object in life. She wants trials, too, and a long engagement will do her no harm. She has been too much accustomed to have her own way. Everything has run

smooth, she has ruled everybody at home all her life, and poor Mr. Page has spoilt her thoroughly."

"No, there I can't agree with you. I don't think she is spoilt, do you know," said Mrs. Melville. "I admire Alexia. I think she is as nice as her father, and he is one of my greatest friends. Don't I see him coming along the road now?"

They were close to the gates, and Mr. Page was approaching in the distance.

"Yes, I think so," said Mrs. Dodd. "You would like to speak to him."

"I should. But you were coming to see us. Do go on to the house; you will find Maud at home, and I shall be in very soon."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Melville, but pray don't hurry."

"I shall only be a few minutes," said Mrs. Melville, gazing anxiously through the gate; and, having parted with Mrs. Dodd a moment later, she forgot her existence altogether, and walked quickly out to meet William Page.

He was looking very grave, very unhappy; this was her first thought; and then she remembered her last talk with him about Alexia, and coloured at the remembrance. She was not quite so sure that she had been right, now, though she would not listen to her own misgivings.

"My dear Mr. Page," she said immediately, "what is this I hear about Alexia?"

With all his loyalty he looked surprised, almost offended. It was hard for him to be attacked twice on this sore subject in the course of one afternoon. He knew that telling Mrs. Dodd was telling the county, and he was afraid that Alexia would be angry; but, when a woman came up and asked him a point-blank question, what was he to do?

"I suppose you mean that Mrs. Dodd has told you of Alexia's engagement," he said to Mrs. Melville, after a moment's hesitation. "It is true. She has engaged herself to marry my nephew, Edmund Rowley."

"Indeed! Well, I hear a very good account of him, and I hope she will be happy," said Mrs. Melville, feeling checked.

"Thank you," he said, with a faint smile, which died away directly from his honest face.

"Of course you must feel it very much; you will miss her dreadfully," said Mrs. Melville, who felt that she must go on

saying something. "What will you do, really? Alexia is so clever, isn't she? and manages everything so well."

"Yes—except her own affairs, I think," said Mr. Page.

"I'm very sorry"—said Mrs. Melville, in a lower tone of sympathy, and then she stood still for a moment, looking at him, half wishing she had not yielded to her friendly impulse of asking about Alexia. "Poor little thing! she must always be a rather awkward subject, and if she was happily married, it ought to be a comfort to everybody, including her father. Well," she said presently, "I can understand that you think him rather young, and—some people don't like cousins marrying—but I have known many instances that turned out very well. Alexia is not the sort of girl to do anything really foolish, is she? She will be the ruling spirit, perhaps, but after all—in fact, we must let young people settle these things in their own way."

Saying this, his liege lady smiled upon him; but her smile had a little lost its celestially healing effect, somehow. Perhaps he thought, just then, that her preaching was not quite the same as her practice. He answered her in a grave, straightforward way.

"Alexia is at liberty to do what she likes. I should be contented, Mrs. Melville, if I could understand her."

"I don't quite—" murmured Mrs. Melville.

"For the first time in our lives," he went on, "she and I don't understand each other. I have no objection to Edmund Rowley, except that he has nothing to live upon, so that it must be a long engagement, I suppose, which is a bad thing—"

"Oh no—not when people are so young—"

He did not notice the interruption in her soft, low tones, but went on, looking beyond her at the great elm trees with their dark masses of leaves, shading the entrance to Redwood Manor.

"I thought I understood Alexia, and that we had no mysteries between us, but I cannot make out why she has done this. I thought the fellow was rather a plague to her, with his ideas and his poetry-books, and that she would be glad when he was gone. I assure you, Mrs. Melville, I was thunderstruck, when, an hour after he left us, she came and told me. I would give all I have to know the meaning of it," he

said, hitting his stick against a stone. "There is something strange about the girl. I know her—I know her—she is not happy," and his voice shook a little. "She has no one to look after her. I have done my best, but it's no use; she is beyond my understanding."

Mrs. Melville was touched by his confidence in her, but she thought girls were not generally such riddles, and Alexia less than most of them. A brave, proud, sensible, good little soul, who had very wisely got over her disappointment, and was not unwilling to accept the first devoted young man who asked her.

"I don't think you ought to distress yourself," Mrs. Melville said very kindly. "It is hard to be father and mother in one, and you have managed it better than most people. And girls are shy about these things, you must remember. From what I know of Alexia, I don't think, Mr. Page, that she would marry a man unless she cared for him."

"I should have said so too—but—here comes the Squire. Thanks for all your goodness. Goodbye."

He was gone, and almost out of sight, before Mrs. Melville met Charlie.

He was looking grave and angry; his eyes were fierce; now, as very rarely in his life, he reminded Mrs. Melville of his father, who used now and then to be moved in this way to sudden indignation against wrong. He was excited too; his lips were pale; and he spoke with his teeth close together.

Mrs. Melville looked at him anxiously, for in these moods he was difficult to manage. At first she thought he had been quarrelling with Maud; then she knew that Maud, poor thing, except from the fact of her existence, had nothing to do with it.

"Mother, this is a dreadful business," began Charlie. "Was that old Page you were talking to just now? What does he say?"

"What do you mean?" said his mother, rather coldly.

"Is it true about Alexia, or one of Mrs. Dodd's lies?"

"Charlie! Mrs. Dodd does not tell lies. And besides—"

"Hang Mrs. Dodd! It is true, then? Mother, look here. You interfered before, I know. You must interfere again. She must not be allowed to do it."

"Charlie, you shock me," said Mrs. Melville. "I should not dream of interfering. What business is it of ours? And

Alexia is perfectly capable of managing her own affairs."

She walked on fast as she spoke, for they were standing in the road, and she thought this talk had better be carried on inside the park gates. She went quickly across the grass into the shade of the elms, where she had met Mrs. Dodd not long before. Charlie kept close to her, repeating at intervals, "It can't be. It's an awful thing. You must interfere."

When they were far enough from public view, she turned round and faced him.

"Do you know, Charlie," she said, "that you pain me exceedingly. I think you are quite forgetting your position, and hers. I respect Alexia very much, and wish her well; and I can see that a safe and happy marriage will be the best thing for her."

"But you don't know everything," said Charlie.

His mother's face was very hard and stern, and her blue eyes shone as she looked at him.

"I am quite at a loss to know what you mean," she said.

"Look here, you and I had better be truthful with each other," said Charlie, his face darkened with a sudden flash.

"I wish for nothing better," said Mrs. Melville.

"Then answer me this. Was it your doing that Alexia refused me last winter?"

"Considering what has happened since —"

"Mother, answer my question."

"It was my doing, partly," said Mrs. Melville. "Such a marriage would have been madness. I spoke to William Page, and he agreed with me. I then spoke to Alexia. She behaved very well, and quite felt the strength of all I said. But of course I could only advise; I could only represent things to her. The refusal was her own decision, and her own doing. She behaved very generously and well."

"You women have queer ideas of right and wrong," said Charlie. "If I had known—good heaven, to think that I had no notion of this till a day or two ago."

"And may I ask, did Alexia tell you?" said Mrs. Melville with extreme coldness. "It is your turn to be truthful now. I must say, all this is rather terrible, and so far from interfering with her marriage—"

"Mother, remember who you are talking of," said Charlie. "Blame me as much as you like, but Alex is the noblest girl in the world, though she has done an awfully wrong thing now."

There was a boyish earnestness in his manner which touched his mother a little, shocked and anxious as she was.

"Please explain this mystery," she said; and Charlie, in answer, very plainly told her the story of his meeting Alexia in the lane, and the sort of talk they had had there.

"I'm quite sure she was not engaged to the fellow then," he said. "I could swear it. It must have been settled that evening, because I saw Mr. Page driving him to the station the next day. And, mother, that child cared for me, and it was because of what I said to her that she went and engaged herself to him. Of course now it's all as clear as daylight. She behaved splendidly; she snubbed me down to the ground. You couldn't have behaved better yourself. So now you know all about it. And you can't let her go and marry a fellow she doesn't care a straw about, because——"

"Because you made a sad fool of yourself," said his mother. "And worse than that, Charlie, for it was very, very wrong of you to go back to the past at all."

"Don't bully me: I know all that," he said; and Mrs. Melville, seeing the depth of sadness in his face and attitude, knew that her heart was aching for him, and for a few moments, forgetting the world and its claims, was troubled with a bitter regret. Presently she said, with a slight sigh:

"It is unfortunate, certainly. Still I hope she may be happy. Everybody does not marry for love."

"No, they don't," said Charlie. "But she won't be happy, any more than——"

"Hush!" murmured his mother. "At any rate, *your* duty is clear."

"But hers isn't!" exclaimed Charlie rebelliously. "I know Alex. She did it in a desperate hurry—all my fault—and she's sorry now. I don't believe she's happy. What did old Page say? Is he satisfied?"

"Not quite, perhaps," said Mrs. Melville. "He seemed puzzled about it. Of course it is not a good match——"

"He wouldn't care about that, if she was contented," said Charlie.

Mrs. Melville had not much to say. They walked on together, farther and farther into the shades of the park, Charlie making his indignant protest over and over again.

"And you couldn't speak to her?"

"No, indeed I couldn't."

"I should have thought that a woman

like you could say anything to a girl she had known always."

"Ah, but the circumstances—impossible," said Mrs. Melville. "No, Charlie, we must leave it; we can do nothing."

This decision by no means satisfied her son. It hardly satisfied herself, for she was quite aware of her responsibility; but it seemed to be the right one, after all. They walked on in the direction of the woods, Charlie talking, his mother listening sadly; she could not stop him, and perhaps felt that it was best for everyone that he should be allowed to talk.

The wives of the Squire and the Rector had long finished their tea, from which Charlie had rushed away in sudden silence when Mrs. Dodd proclaimed her news. His wife asked one or two questions in a cool sort of way, and then changed the subject.

After waiting a long time for Mrs. Melville's promised return, Mrs. Dodd found it advisable to go home. Her hostess was dull, and had yawned several times; conversation flagged. Mr. Dodd, too, had not yet heard the confirmation of the last piece of village gossip.

On one of those hot afternoons, a few days after this, Mrs. Melville walked to the Farm, and was shown into Alexia's drawing-room, where she was writing a letter. The visit was an effort to Mrs. Melville. It was paid to please Charlie, but also to quiet her own conscience, for she could not leave Alexia without a word of sympathy or kindness on such an occasion as this. Curiosity, perhaps, was also mixed with Mrs. Melville's motives; and she had a plan on foot, which she thought wise, though Charlie had suggested it. In fact, though she trusted her son, she hardly liked to go away from Redwood, leaving him and Maud with that innocent disturber so near their gates. They were going away after a few weeks. And Maud, though she hardly mentioned Alexia now, looked a little sulky, and watched her husband with eyes that made Mrs. Melville uneasy. So when Charlie said—"Mother, take her to Whitby with you. Find out what she really means, and make her break it off:" his mother thought that the first part of this plan might be worth trying. As to the second, no: she could only wish that Alexia might be married as soon as possible; but she was very cautious with Charlie, and did not tell him that.

Mrs. Melville had never been in Alexia's house since the day of that painful con-



versation in the winter. Alexia had looked shadowy enough then, that winter afternoon in the firelight; but she was much more changed, now, from the happy, spirited girl who used to rule Mr. Page and his household. As she got up from her writing-table to receive Mrs. Melville, her visitor thought she had never seen a young face so worn, so hardened; and, in spite of all the awkwardness, her heart ached for the girl. She pressed her hand kindly, and was going to kiss her, but Alexia seemed utterly unconscious of her intention, and was not kissed.

"You must let me wish you happiness, Alexia," said Mrs. Melville, still holding her hand. She could not be quite snubbed by a child like this.

"Thank you very much," said Alexia, without a smile; and Mrs. Melville began to feel a little angry with her. Nothing, she reflected, had absolutely forced the girl to engage herself to young Rowley. As she had been rash enough to do it, she must have courage and good manners enough to take the consequences. So Mrs. Melville asked one or two questions about Edmund and his family, which Alexia, thus put upon her mettle, answered fully and with perfect coolness. It was evident that she had no idea of being disloyal to Edmund, or of keeping any of their arrangements a secret from the world. Finding that she had this courage, Mrs. Melville forgave her, and began to admire her again. In words, however, she admired the beautiful roses and other flowers with which Alexia had filled her room. Then she made friends with a dog that ran in, and went on talking of the merest trifles, not being able now to make up her mind about asking Alexia to go to Whitby. Perhaps she would have given it up, but for a long stolen look at Alexia's face as she leaned over the table and arranged some falling roses. The young face was so wonderfully pretty, with the faint flush that had come into it now; the delicate profile had such a curious distinction, and the slight lines of pain were so sweet, as well as sad, that Mrs. Melville in her heart did not wonder at Charlie, and felt that she herself owed a good deal of compensation.

"I am going away very soon, Alexia," she said, after a moment's silence.

"Are you? Oh yes, my father said he thought you were going to the sea. And he was so afraid you would not come back any more," Alexia said gently, still occupied with her roses.

"I suppose I shall not live here any more. Of course I am not wanted."

"We want you, and so does everybody else in Redwood."

"You are very kind to me, my dear," said Mrs. Melville, with the slightest uncertainty in her voice—but Alexia did not look at her. "I shall be sorry to leave you and your father, and other people too—but you are not going to stay here yourself, you see."

"For a great many years," said Alexia, and then she looked at Mrs. Melville and smiled for the first time, a sad little twilight smile. "I don't know when my father can do without me—never, I think," she said.

"Ah yes, he will accept his fate, you will find," said Mrs. Melville. "Fathers and mothers are very unselfish people."

"I don't want him to be unselfish," Alexia murmured, half to herself.

"Well, but I was going to talk about the present, not the future," said Mrs. Melville. "I never look on very far, unless it is necessary. I am going away in about a fortnight—to Whitby, I think, for a few weeks, and I have been thinking, Alexia—will you be very kind and nice, and go with me?"

The girl looked up now in astonishment, and after one quick, enquiring glance turned her head away again, conscious of the deep flush that was mounting slowly to her hair.

"I shall be alone, you know," said Mrs. Melville, and then she regretted the unnecessary words, for of course Alexia must never know of Charlie's confidences. "I should like to have you," she went on rather hastily, "and I think a breath of sea air would do you good. All this hot weather has been tiring, and you are looking pale."

She was not at all prepared for what happened next. The brave, cool, high-spirited young mistress of the Farm lost her dignity for once; her pride, her self-respect, vanished like smoke, certainly for the first time in public; she was on the floor at Mrs. Melville's feet, kissed her hands once, and then broke into a fit of passionate crying, with her face hidden against Mrs. Melville's knees. Those were scorching tears, and the sobs were more strained, more painful, because of the days of high-strung excitement that had gone before. The pain and shame of having given way was an added agony.

Mrs. Melville sat quite still, looking down

at the girl crouching there. She was very sorry that this had happened, and as much surprised as Alexia herself. She was in a disagreeable position; her blue eyes were troubled, her clear brows frowning; but, to do her justice, though she felt very much for herself, she felt still more for Alexia, and acknowledged in her mind that Charlie had been only too right in all he said. This child did care for him, and her accepting the other man had been a very desperate little action, caused no doubt by that talk in the lane. It was indeed a most painful business. Mrs. Melville was terribly puzzled what to say or do. One thing, however, was plain; that affair in the winter had gone very much deeper with Alexia than anyone could have imagined; this girl who knelt here crying was nearly broken-hearted, and Mrs. Melville herself had done it all. She must console the girl, and certainly could not lecture her, for she could read the whole story plainly enough now. She laid her hand on the dark soft curls, and stroked them for a few moments, without speaking, while Alexia struggled hard to conquer her sobs, and was filled now with burning shame. One could not lie there with hidden eyes for ever, and how would it be possible to look up and face Mrs. Melville again?

At last Mrs. Melville spoke. "My dear," she said, in her softest, most musical tones, "you really must not do this."

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I am such a fool," muttered Alexia with catching breath; and then she suddenly sprang up, and sitting down by the table, shaded her eyes with her hand.

"I don't think you are at all well," said Mrs. Melville. "You ought to go to some bracing place, and Whitby will be the very thing for you." But as she spoke she knew very well that Alexia would not go to Whitby.

"You are most kind," said Alexia, as she leaned over the table, her voice still very tremulous. "It is so good of you to think of it, but I am going away—almost directly. I am going to Devonshire again for a few weeks."

"Devonshire?"

"To stay at Edmund's home," said Alexia very low, and Mrs. Melville felt a sudden twinge of pity for Edmund.

She sat there and tried to talk, for a few minutes longer. Then she thought it would be kinder and wiser to leave the girl alone, as perfect openness between them was impossible. She was a tall woman, and she

looked down into Alexia's eyes as she said "Good-bye." She thought what lovely eyes they were, dark and soft and eloquent, the eyelids still a little reddened, and the lashes wet with tears.

"Kiss me, child," she said; and for a moment she held Alexia tight in her arms.

Alexia was quite calm now; she looked up, and wondered what Mrs. Melville would say if she knew everything. Perhaps, after all, she might have said what she did say, turning back from the door, when she was nearly gone.

"Alexia, there is one gift I would pray for beyond all others, for everyone I love. Do you know what it is? Courage."

"Yes, I am a coward," thought Alexia. But she only bent her head and smiled.

### NEXT OF KIN.

#### A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

#### CHAPTER III.

MURIEL LAKE and her brother were standing together by the easel which held Muriel's just completed painting of the Cathedral aisle. Muriel's face was flushed with honest pride; so was her brother's.

"You are a brick, Muriel," was the Post Office clerk's commendation of his sister's success. "Your sketch is a real gem. No wonder you have sold it already. What a pity it is that Nature didn't fit me up with the same sort of brains she has bestowed on you!"

"Pray don't deplore that, my dear Tom," replied Muriel, "or I shall think you are fishing for compliments. I feel inclined to lament that my earnings are so uncertain and casual, and that my contributions to housekeeping are so spasmodic and unsatisfactory, while yours are as safe as the Bank of England; and I am so provoked when I calculate my gains to see that there is no prospect of our sending mother out of this cold damp place for the winter. In a favourable climate she might pick up her strength. I don't believe she ever will here."

"That's a dismal view of the matter, Muriel," said Tom, slowly; "but I'm afraid it is true. Do you know," he continued, "I have more than half a mind to get Hedley's opinion."

"Hedley," repeated Muriel; "is that your new doctor-friend?"

"Yes; that fellow I told you was lecturing at the Institute. He's a sound, good fellow, and if I could pin my faith on any doctor, I could on him."

"Why? Has he been doing anything very marvellous in the way of cures?"

"Nothing miraculous that I have heard of. I believe he is looked up to in his profession; but it is the manner of the man that carries me away. He's such a trustworthy soul."

"Well, if you have such confidence in him, and as we are so uneasy about mother's health, let us get his advice. Only, Tom, we shall never persuade her into the extravagance of seeing a doctor when she is not suffering from any specific illness."

"I know that," replied Tom; "but don't you see that's just where it all comes in. I shall ask Hedley here as my friend, for I want you and him to know one another; and I shall prime him to make a professional use of his visit, by which means, perhaps, we shall find ourselves curing the mother, without having had any argument with her over the thin end of the wedge."

"And do you know anything about this Mr. Hedley, Tom—who he is and where comes from?"

"Oh, do listen to her!" exclaimed Tom. "Is she going over in a body to Mrs. Grundy, that she must ask for a man's credentials before she makes up her mind to be introduced to him? Why, Muriel, success has inflated you!"

"Not in the least, Tom," replied Muriel composedly. "I am merely curious to hear about your friend; if you know anything of his antecedents?"

"Oh, yes; I know lots about him. He is perfectly unreserved in manner. He was born in Australia, and came to England to be educated as a doctor. I don't think he has any idea of going back to Colonial life, for he has no ties out there. His grandfather, or his grandmother, or one of his progenitors, was a Carchester person."

"Is that the reason he has come to settle here?"

"I should not think so. At least I am quite sure it is not; for he has told me that he is, as far as he knows, the last survivor of his family; which ought to work on your feelings, so that you make him warmly welcome."

"No doubt I shall do that, especially if his medical skill inspires me with a faith in him like yours. And indeed," added Muriel, speaking more seriously, "I hope you will have him here soon, for, when I see mother getting thinner and paler every day, my heart sinks within me, and I feel very dreary."

This was how John Hedley came to be introduced to the Lake household; and though his visits there did not magically restore to Mrs. Lake her exhausted strength, which nothing but remedies far beyond her means could give back, these visits made a great difference to the family life.

For this young man who (it must be candidly owned) had the smallest possible income and no hope for the future except in his own unaided exertions; this unknown doctor of no family fell madly in love with Muriel Lake; proposed to her as soon as he dared; and was accepted. The engagement was to be a long one—indeinitely long; but for all its trial of uncertain delay, Muriel Lake looked brighter than ever as she worked at her painting in the rare gleams of wintry sunshine, and the shadows that came over her face were brought there, not by the remoteness of her own hopes, but by the ever-pressing need of finding funds to send her fragile mother out of the reach of the wild north-east winds, that swept the downs in the cruel January frosts.

For John Hedley was a man of whose love a girl might justly be proud. He was large-hearted and generous, a man of earnest thoughts, high ideas, and indomitable perseverance, and withal of a genial simplicity of manner, which stood out in the clearer relief because of the depth and intensity of his moral qualities. It was this sympathy of candour and of single-heartedness that had first drawn him to Muriel, and the similarity of their aims and hopes rivetted the bonds that joined them. If this story were a record of their love-making, it would have plenteous material to work upon.

As it is, the young doctor's passion for Muriel must yield the place to the old verger's admiration of her, which had steadily grown from the day on which he had first looked over her shoulder and passed judgment on her skill.

Muriel had followed up her successful sketch by a series of views of the Cathedral interior, and, while she worked, Peter had not neglected his opportunity of cultivating her acquaintance, and, as time went on, of confiding to her—what he had told to no one besides—his loneliness and weariness, and his unsuccessful search of some one to fill the void of his life.

At last he began to entertain an idea, which, so to speak, took all the wind out of the sails of these hypothetical relatives, and he allowed himself, on the strength of it, to face the conviction that no rich or

kin remained to him. This idea had burst suddenly upon him one Sunday afternoon, when the Cathedral was crowded to listen to a sermon preached by the famous Dean Longwynd, of Birmingham. The eloquence of the Dean had attracted Miss Lake among many others, and she had been installed by her devoted admirer in a much more advantageous seat than that which he had seen fit to allot to Mrs. Monypenny for the modest fee of half a sovereign. Muriel sat near the pulpit, and when Peter—after he had, mace in hand, conducted the preacher up the choir—sat down on his accustomed perch below the pulpit, his eye could rest fondly on the rounded cheek and bright eyes of his protégée, while one withered hand held his mace, and the other crept involuntarily towards his waistcoat pocket, where Mrs. Monypenny's half-sovereign reposed in very good company. He felt sure that that sweet-faced girl was not rich; he was quite connoisseur enough of ladies' dress to know that hers was remarkably inexpensive, and always the same; by other signs and tokens, too, he had read the secret of Muriel's exchequer. He was not, he acknowledged to himself, a liberal man, yet he was moved by a strong desire to give her anything she might need. He might even—but the supposition was too wild. He scarcely dared formulate it in his mind. *Could* he give up his long-cherished dream of kith and kin, and alter his will? He quite trembled with excitement. The Dean's stream of eloquence flowed on over his head, but the loud, stern tones did not arrest his attention, nor did the low, pathetic tones move him. He seemed to be passing into a kind of hazy dream, as he sat watching the slender figure and well-poised head in the dark oak seat before him. Then her face, and all the faces, the seats, the pillars and screens, and the floor seemed to melt and mingle into a mist which closed round him and oppressed him. A noise, as of loud surging seas swelled up behind him, covering the voice of the preacher as the mist had veiled his sight. He tried to cry out, but he could only gasp—to stir, but his limbs were as heavy as lead. Then, just as the Dean's voice was modulated to its lowest audible tones, and while two thousand pairs of ears were straining to catch his solemn utterances, there was a loud clatter and a feeble cry, as from Peter's helpless hand his heavy mace fell crashing to the floor, startling the congregation, and rousing the old man

from his semi-unconsciousness to a state of dizzy confusion and bewilderment. Before he had recovered himself someone had stepped forward, handed him his fallen insignia of office, and, laying a cool, firm hand on his, had said softly: "Don't be frightened, you had fallen asleep." By that time he was sufficiently collected to see Miss Lake, with a very pretty blush on her face and neck, resume her seat.

To the disturbed congregation the incident was just as trivial as it was annoying, but to Peter it seemed as if it was the determining sequel to his previous sudden thought; and from that day he looked upon Muriel as the heiress to his property, and as the substitute who represented all his absent and lost ones.

A few days after this incident, Muriel missed his accustomed visits to her easel, and when nearly a week had passed without his reappearance, she enquired for him among the black-gowned brotherhood whom he called his "colleaguys," and she heard that the poor old verger was ill, or at least seriously ailing. Kind-hearted Muriel at once asked her way to his house, and, following the narrow alleys behind the Cathedral, knocked at his door, and walked in upon his dreary solitude. He was crouching over the fire in the twilight, which was gathering earlier and more quickly in his cheerless room than outside. He scarcely turned his head as she entered, but when he heard the sound of her voice he started eagerly, and, making an ineffectual effort to rise, cried:

"Dear heart, dear heart! to think of the pretty creetur coming to see a poor old, worn-out fellow like me, and me thinking it was only her as waits upon me opening the door. Take a chair, Missy, do; I'm that quakin' and achin' that I can't get up to hand it to you. Bless you!" he ejaculated fervently; "bless your pretty face!"

"I'm sorry you are so poorly," said Muriel kindly. "I heard about it from the other vergers, and so, as I know you live alone, I thought I'd come and see if you are in need of anything."

"Dear, dear heart! To think o' that!" said Peter again. "No, Missy, thank'ee kindly. I wants for nothing but a new head, a new body, and new limbs, which I'm not likely to get;" and he chuckled at his grim joke. "As to bein' all alone, it's lonesome like, but it's best for me; for they're such a rascally lot about here, I'm never easy as long as there's anyone pokin' about the premises."



"Surely you don't wait upon yourself?" asked Muriel.

"Not altogether, Missy," he replied, shaking his head slowly. "Not so much as I should like to. You see I'm old and helpless, and I must have someone in to help me; but I can't trust 'em. They rob me and cheat me; they're such a good-for-nothing lot."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Muriel sympathetically, though she felt a strong inclination to smile.

"Since my poor wife's death, eleven years ago," continued Peter, "I've had but a poor time of it with 'em. I don't know which is the least to be trusted, the women or the gals. When I've got a woman to clean up for me, I fancy the women are the worst, for they're so grasping, and so inquisitive, and so domineering; and when I get a gal, I fancy they're the worst, for they're so flighty, and so gossippy, and so idle. They're baggages, all on 'em; that's what I call 'em, baggages! But they'll have to be very sly indeed if they mean to cheat me."

"And what does the doctor say of your illness?" asked Muriel, when the old man had finished his tirade.

"The doctor says nothing about my complaint," replied Peter, with an important air.

"Indeed!" pursued Muriel. "Doesn't he say when you may expect to be about again?"

"No," replied Peter, with his slow head-shake. "He has said nothing, because he ha'n't been asked to give his opinion, you see. I don't want no doctors pottering about me, and running me up long bills for their physics and stuff. I'm suffering from something as no doctors' drugs can cure. They can cut off broken legs and useless arms, and give folks artificial ones instead; but they can't cut twenty or thirty years off a man's age, and give him a new constitution to work upon; so I shan't trouble the doctors with my case."

"Still, a doctor might do you some good," said Muriel hopefully. Her trust in doctors, or, rather, in the doctor, had greatly grown and increased of late.

"I don't think it, Missy," replied Peter obstinately. "I don't think it. It would be more the other way with me and the doctor when we made up our accounts."

"Well," said Muriel, a faint blush flickering into her cheeks. "I wish you would let me ask a doctor, who is a good, kind friend of mine, to come and see you.

Just let me have my own way about it," she went on coaxingly. "I don't like you to be ill all alone without proper care; and if you can't afford to pay him I'll make it all right."

The old man stretched out his hand towards her with his favourite exclamation: "Dear heart, dear heart! To think of that!"

"Then I may tell the doctor to come to see you," said Muriel, rising to go.

"Yes; you may tell him if you like," said Peter. "I can't say you nay; and as to payin' him, you're wonderful kind" (liberality was indeed a virtue in his eyes), "but I can afford to pay him myself. I can afford it as well as anyone; but I look on it as so much money thrown away. Anyhow, you'll come and see me again? Your visits will do me a sight more good than any doctor's."

Accordingly, John Hedley went, at Muriel's bidding, to prescribe for Mr. Peter Brown. He found that worthy somewhat grim and impenetrable, half willing to receive him, as having come with an excellent introduction, half suspicious of him as a medical cormorant who only sought a pretext for sending in a long bill of extortionate charges. However, John's honest, unpretending manner so far gained Peter's confidence, that he consented to have a bottle of "stuff" and to allow the doctor to call again. The "stuff" didn't do him much good; indeed, how should it? For he had well described his malady when he had told Muriel, in homely language, that he was "confectus annis." Nevertheless, as it was very dull work sitting by the fire with no one to speak to, the doctor's visits were a cheery break in the day's monotony—particularly welcome, because the doctor was so ready to listen to the praises of Muriel Lake's beauty and perfection.

In those long, solitary musings beside his fire, and in his sleepless nights, the old man had thought a great deal about the will he wished to make in Muriel's favour. His visionary kinsfolk were now banished from his mind, or only remembered with a hope that none of them would appear to baulk his latest intention; and he resolutely suppressed any occasional twinge of remorse that whispered to him of a possible injustice in gratifying this new impulse. Meanwhile, days passed on; he was always too ill and weak to take the necessary steps unaided; and as he was invincibly determined that no Carchester

lawyer should know any of his secrets before death made them public property, he fell on the expedient of asking John Hedley's help, under strict seal of secrecy.

So it came about that one evening John, little dreaming he was elected to such an honour, walked down to the Cathedral precincts. For some reason or other he was feeling low-spirited, and his mind gave a gloomy shade to whatever his thoughts turned upon. Patient and persevering as he was, he could not always have hopefulness at his beck and call. The net total of his external circumstances was not a very cheering sum. Want of means, of social position, of family advantages, cramped him on all sides, to which troubles came an additional load in the knowledge that Muriel must work so hard and so ineffectually to supply her mother's needs. It was not always easy to him to consider his prospects with equanimity, and to realise how long was the vista which lay between him and the day he should call his love his wife.

This being his state of mind, he was not in the choicest mood to receive a confidence; but that evening Peter, feeling his faculties to be unusually bright and clear—brighter, clearer than they had been for weeks—resolved to broach the momentous subject.

"Doctor," he began, leaning forward and keenly scanning the honest face beside him, "I'm a very old man, and I'm not long for this world. That's quite true, ain't it?"

John Hedley, from mere habit, tried to give a comforting rejoinder. "You're old, certainly," he said; "there's no denying that; "but—"

"Oh, it ain't no use to say 'but,'" interrupted Peter brusquely. "I can feel inwardly what's comin' on me. I don't want any man's buts and maybes. I haven't much time before me, and I've got a lot to settle before I go, which, if it ain't thought about and settled soon, it won't be in my power to have it as I wish;" and the old man shook his head quite vindictively at John Hedley as he spoke.

"Very true," replied John, thus reprimanded, "only I should not have put it so harshly myself."

"And now," continued Peter, his manner becoming a shade more conciliatory, "I've found you a very obligin' young man, and pretty well for straightforwardness."

"Thank you," said the other gravely.

"And so I'm going to ask you to do a bit of very private writing for me, for I'm that shaky I can't hold my pen nohow, though

I've tried several times so as to be independent."

"I'll write for you with pleasure," said John cordially. "Is it to ask some of your relations to come and look after you now you are ill?"

"No," replied Peter shortly, not wishing to revert to the subject of relations. "I've got no one belongin' to me in the world. I want a letter written to my lawyer about my will."

John Hedley was rather astonished at this high-sounding announcement from an old man, whom he had looked on as very nearly a pauper; but he repressed his surprise, and merely asked where he should find a pen. His quiet acceptance of the object of the letter was rather mortifying to Peter, who had intended to produce quite an effect on the young man whom he had chosen for his confidant. He had many times rehearsed the scene, and the doctor's amazement had always been a very important feature in it. It was rather a blow to his self-importance that John Hedley merely asked for a pen and ink.

"You knew I had a bit of property to will and devise at my decease, eh?" he said, sharply eyeing his companion.

"No," replied John innocently. "If I fancied anything, it was that you were almost destitute."

"Umph," said the old man with a knowing nod, "perhaps I'm better off than some folks as make a deal of show with their carriages and servants."

"Very likely," said John, who was due at the little house in Bristol Terrace when he left the sick verger; "and now what shall I say in the letter?"

"Stop a bit," replied Peter, who, having opened his lips did not mean to close them upon half-confidences, "I want to say a mort o' things before we come to the letter, that is, if you have the time to listen."

"I can spare half-an-hour," said John generously. This was magnanimous, if you reckon the self-denial implied.

Peter looked round cautiously before he began his confidences, as if he were afraid of chance listeners; and when he spoke, it was in so low a tone that John was obliged to draw up closer in order to catch all he said.

"I've been a savin' man all my life," began the verger, "and a careful man, as my father was before me. He left me a few hundreds, and I've gone on adding to it ever since. I'm worth a good bit now. How much should you think?"

"I haven't a notion," replied the other, whose particular aversion was avarice in any form.

"Give a guess," said Peter, with his scrutinising eyes fixed on John Hedley's.

"I really couldn't," was the reply.

The old man saw that there was no curiosity in the face he was scanning. He was determined to bring surprise into it.

"What should you say to £9,600 odd well invested, and £70 a-year in house rents?" he asked triumphantly.

"It's a good sum," answered John Hedley. But his face looked colder still. At the moment he felt nothing but repulsion at this revelation of miserliness, and the grim contrast it offered to his own needs.

"Yes, it is a tidy sum," said Peter, not a little disappointed by this reception of his confidence, "a very tidy sum, and I'm going to settle what shall become of it when I'm dead and gone. I'm a lone old man, doctor, you see. My children died long ago, and my old wife followed them, and I've no one I care for of my own blood. I used to think that my children and grandchildren should benefit by my careful ways; but, dear heart, dear heart, who can tell how we shall be taken, and how we shall be left?"

John Hedley's face was softening.

"I had a brother once," pursued the old man, when he had paused to take breath; "he was a good bit older than me, and very racketty—very racketty. At last he ran away to Australia and sent no word of himself—never a word, at least we never got a word, so I had all my father's savings. He broke my mother's heart; she was a weakly creature, and she broke her heart after him."

Then he stopped. He seemed to lose himself for a while, until John Hedley recalled him by saying:

"And have you never heard anything of your lost brother?"

"No," replied Peter, recollecting himself, "I've done what I could to trace him. I thought perhaps there might be some one belongin' to him who might be the better for all I have saved, but nothing came of all the lookin' and the lawyers, and the rest of it."

"Perhaps," suggested John, "your brother died and left no 'family."

"That's what I think," returned Peter. "He must ha' died, and so it's no use to look any longer. I did once think I'd leave the money to charities, but lately I've changed my mind—I've changed my

mind," he repeated, lowering his voice still more, "and I'll tell you what I mean to do, and then you can write to yon lawyer and tell him all about it. He must have a new will made, and send a clerk down here for me to sign it, and you can witness it."

"Very well," said John, hoping that his detention was nearly over, "I'll do all that."

"Well, then," said Peter, trembling with excitement, "I'm going to leave all as belongs to me—all, to that young lady I spoken of so often to you;" and he added slyly as he saw John's surprise, "perhaps you may be the better for that some day, if my old eyes don't deceive me."

"Have you thought the matter well over?" asked John. "You would not do such a thing without due consideration."

"Oh, I've considered and considered till my mind's more than made up. I shall be wronging no one. If that advertisement was to be answered, I should have had the answer by now. It was worded very plain. Depend upon it, there was no one to answer to it. Nay, I'll show it to you," he continued, "and you shall judge for yourself whether it wasn't as plain as a pikestaff."

So saying he drew from the shelf beside him an old copy of "The Standard," and laid his finger on the lines addressed to Josiah Brown or his direct heirs.

John took the paper absently. He was bewildered by the strangeness of the old man's confidence. The notion of Muriel being heiress to £10,000 sent a convulsion through the order of things which had before seemed established around him. His point of view had to adjust itself to a new horizon, which contained a great many hitherto strange and now unwelcome possibilities. Muriel a rich woman! His pride bristled with the bare notion that he might be tempted to be glad for his own sake, and his love sickened with an inconsistent and insane dread of a possible gulf wider than poverty that might open between them.

"There it is," repeated Peter, "can't you see it?"

He read the words with Peter's sharp eyes upon him. He read them mechanically more than once before he understood their sense, and then more than once again, with a changed and quickened expression that did not escape his companion. Finally he laid the paper down, and passed his hand over his eyes as if to clear his sight.

"Well," queried Peter, "it's plain enough for anything, isn't it?"

"Quite," replied the doctor laconically. Then he dipped his pen in the ink, and looked at Peter for instructions.

The old man did not speak.

"I'm waiting to write the letter to your lawyers," he said, and his voice had a curious, constrained sound, as if he spoke with effort. But still the other kept silence with his ferret-like eyes fixed on his companion's face.

"Young man," he said at last suddenly, with solemnity, "you know something of Josiah Brown; your face looks as if you had seen a ghost."

"I!" exclaimed John, the blood rushing back to his face; "what makes you think that?"

"Well, do you, or do you not?" asked Peter, in the tone of a man who means to have an answer. "I ought to know if there is anything to be told. It'll make less confusion afterwards. You ain't got no right to see me leavin' all I'm worth to that young lady, pretty as she is and good as she is, if my own flesh and blood stands in need;" and all Peter's sense of family ties revived within him. "It wouldn't be no ways fair."

John paused; he was weighing Muriel's needs against other needs and desires. "I don't think," at last he said, "you'll have any answer whatever to this advertisement."

"But how can you tell that?" asked Peter still more persistently, "unless you know all about my kin, which you've no right to keep to yourself."

This was quite right. John Hedley felt he was not justified in concealing what his honest face had unwittingly let the old man suspect; but all he answered was: "I assure you, on my word of honour, that you'll wrong no one I know anything of, if you leave every penny you have to Miss Lake."

"Doctor," said Peter, with great irritation, "I thought I was judge enough of faces to make no mistakes about honest men, but it seems I have not added you up right. I ain't goin' to rest until I know what you're hidin' from me, and you shan't persuade me to leave what ought to go elsewhere to your sweetheart. That's plain speakin', and you can understand it."

John Hedley's face grew first red, and then very pale; he was too simple and single-hearted to have seen that reading of his confusion.

"You should be careful, my good friend, how you insult a man with such words as

those," he said, rising. "I will wish you good evening. Settle your affairs without my help, since you mistrust me; but, be certain that, if honesty had required me to tell you anything whatever, I should not have concealed it for an instant, least of all that my future wife might benefit by your hoarded money."

He spoke angrily, with his hand on the latch; yet, as he glanced back at the infirm figure on the hearth, he felt a thrill of that pity which is nearest to love for the suspicious old miser, whom the last few minutes had invested with a new importance in his eyes.

"Doctor, doctor," cried the quavering voice after him, "are you going to deny an old man the last chance he has of foregathering with his own flesh and blood. Come back here," he went on imperiously, "come and look me in the face, and make no mysteries; for, though I don't know your name, nor where you come from, nor anything else about you, it is borne in upon me that you are the one I have been looking for, and had given up. Tell me the plain truth."

Thus adjured, John Hedley turned back, and once more sat down beside the old man's chair.

"There are no means," he said quietly, "of proving satisfactorily a relationship, which the last few minutes have suggested to me may exist between us; nothing but my own supposition. Had there been, I should not have felt justified in trying to keep you in the dark. However, as you insist on knowing why I changed colour on reading just now, for the first time, your advertisement, I will tell you the little there is to tell. My mother's father was a native of Carchester, his name was Josiah Brown. He had lived a wild, roving life in Australia in his early manhood, but married and settled down in later life. My mother, his only child, he named Patience after his own mother; she also is dead. Now, all this may be mere coincidence, or it may be that you are really my grandfather's brother. As I said, it would be out of my power to find proofs. Pray forgive me if my impatience just now pained you, or if I have raised expectations by my unguarded surprise."

"Dear heart, dear heart!" gasped Peter, shivering with excitement. "To think how things come about, and how they work out! Why, it's quite clear he was Josiah. Who else could he ha' been? Tell me that!"



"It seems a natural conclusion," answered John, with forced calmness, "but that is a long way from being quite clear. I know little of the ways of lawyers, but I hardly think they would give credence to such a story."

Peter did not attempt to answer; he passed his trembling hands across his swimming eyes, and slowly moved his head from side to side.

"Dear heart! dear heart!" was all he could say. "I'll just get to bed and think it over. Come and tell me about it again to-morrow. Come, and we'll talk it over. Dear heart, dear heart! to think o' this! Good night to you. Good night, boy."

After this John Hedley went up to Bristol Terrace with a very strong impression that he was asleep and dreaming, and that presently he should wake and find himself by the fire, in his easy-chair, with his book slipping out of his hands on to the floor.

Past midnight, when he was preparing, after a long reverie, to go to bed, he was summoned by the night-bell.

"It's old Master Brown, down by the Cathedral, as is took much worse," said the woman who stood at the door. "It's my belief he's goin' fast, and that now't can do him any good; but he keeps on callin' for the doctor, so I came just not to moither the old man in his death struggle. Otherwise it ain't no good your coming."

John hurried out at once, and, outstripping the messenger, stood in a few minutes by the dying bed of the old man.

"Is he come?" gasped Peter, as he heard the sound of footsteps.

"Yes; I am here," answered John, bending over the pallid face and fast fading eyes, and taking in his firm clasp the hand the old man tried to hold out to him.

The woman thought the doctor was feeling his pulse.

"There ain't much life left in him," she said in the loud, distinct whisper which women of her class always employ in a sick-room.

"Send her away," murmured the dying man; and when this was done he made one last effort to collect his thoughts and to utter them. "You must have the money, my lad," he said, drawing John's hand down to his panting bosom. "I'm sure you are the right one. Your face has been looking at me all night, and I can see Josiah's face in it. It's honest money, and you needn't despise it. I wanted to benefit that sweet lassie, but I can't rob my own

kin. Snaggs and Taip has my will. You'll go to them, won't you?"

"Yes, yes," returned John, greatly moved. "Thank you for your good will to me."

"Come a bit closer," said Peter more faintly. "It's a great comfort not to die alone. I shall have plenty of company in a few minutes—all I've cared about—but I had no one here. God bless you and her, my boy."

John lifted the dying head, that the few remaining breaths might be less laboured, and the old verger passed to his long rest leaning on the bosom of his long-sought next of kin.

John and Muriel were married much sooner than they had dared to hope when they first pledged their word to one another. Part of Peter's long-hoarded wealth went to buy a country practice on the Devonshire coast, where Mrs. Lake has most marvellously recovered her health and strength, and where Doctor and Mrs. Hedley are extremely popular, and as happy as the day is long.

#### HIGHWAYS AND BY-WAYS.

THERE is plenty of interest to be got out of a public highway, not only from its passengers and vehicles, but from a contemplation of the road itself in its various moods and conditions—whether, like some dark and sullen river, it reflects the lines of gaslights in quivering gleams, or echoes joyously in bright sunshine to the tread of hurrying feet. But perhaps the most interesting epoch of the road's existence is when it almost ceases to exist, and is broken up to be relaid and renewed; especially when the renewal is of a thoroughgoing character—stone or macadam exchanged for wood or asphalt.

It is when our more distinguished fellow-creatures have taken leave of the pleasures and politics of the town, that these operations are to be seen at their best.

The big houses are shut up. On the doorstep where once the lordly flunkies used to tower, and whence Lady Violet and the Honourable Miss Myrtle would daintily descend, now Mary and Susan flirt openly with the policeman, while cook, among the faded shrubs in the balcony overhead, waves her handkerchief to the passing guardsman.

But while solitude on board wages reigns in the long lines of mansions, the road below is the scene of labour and animation. Great piles of wooden blocks form a barri-

cade across the thoroughfare and protect the rear of the working party, while a band of pioneers in front attack the adamant crust of the existing macadam with sledge-hammer and pickaxe. Others level the bed of the road and deposit the blocks of wood in long rows ready for the hand of the setter—the setter ready of hand and swift with the gleaming axe. Another man sets the strings, which strings are laths left between each row of blocks, to be presently pulled up, while a man with a broom sweeps dry cement into the crevices. Then follows Aquarius with a water-bucket, leaving a layer of wet cement behind him, which Gemini, with each a huge broom, sweep into every cranny, while Libra comes after in the shape of a long metal gauge to make all square and fair.

The details of the scene are continually changing, for there is no settled opinion on the subject of paving. As many as there are vestries are the different processes employed, and we are still a long way from perfection in any one of them. Asphalte, which is excellent in dry weather, is execrable when wet; and both asphalte and wood are terrible in frost, when it is a piteous sight to see the poor horses slipping at every stride, and falling in all directions. The old stones, the manner of which we have almost forgotten—the cubes of granite that stout paviers used to batter at with their huge wooden monkeys, standing in a row and beating time—the old stones gave a better foothold, and the relief to human brains from the deafening roar of the streets is purchased by some increase of suffering to the horses.

As well as the making of old ways a good deal of new work is going on, in the way of streets that have just left the builders' hands. London is continually marching into the country, impelled, as it were, by a resistless impulse towards expansion. This progress has recently been checked, no doubt; but it had previously for many years gone on in a gradually increasing ratio. The extension of London for the past dozen years has averaged nearly fifty miles of new streets every year, and the culminating period was reached in 1881, when eighty-six miles of new streets were added to the beat of the Metropolitan police.

The process of street-making is a simple one. The line of road and causeway is laid down by the builder, under the supervision of the surveyor of the local authority, and the builder usually puts down

the heavy granite sets which form the kerb of the footway. The gas and water pipes have been laid in the preliminary operations, and a row of gas lamps is not long in following the first appearance of human settlers on the scene. Then generally follows a period of dirt and disorganisation in the new street. The roadway is ploughed up into ruts; the rain forms huge pools of liquid mud; in the hot summer days clouds of dust sweep along loaded with particles of organic matter; for no scavenger visits the street, no water-carts. The street is not yet taken over by the vestry or local board, and none of its officials, except the rate-collector, pays a visit to the devoted spot, which becomes a convenient receptacle for dead cats and dogs and refuse of every kind. This kind of purgatory lasts frequently for several years. And then one day an army of contractor's men appears upon the scene. Piles of flag-stones are reared here and there, which have come from quarries among the hills of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the stone-cutters are at work chipping them to the exact measurement required. Meantime the bed of the roadway is formed with rough stones and brickbats, which a few hours' pressure from the steam roller reduces to something like the profile of a road. The side channels are formed of granite blocks, supplied most likely from the rough and rugged hills of Cornwall, or it may be from the granite city in the North, or the quarries of the farthest Orcades. The crossings, too, are formed of the same material, and then, with cartloads of broken stones and continual application of the steam roller, the road may be considered made.

But let us get off the stones if we can; stones that were once typical of the streets of London, which have ceased to be paved with gold even in the imagination of the veriest yokel, since pitch pine and bitumen have come into fashion; let us away into the country and see what road-makers are doing there. Our distinguished friends who are visiting each other, at lordly castles and baronial halls, have not escaped from the miseries of road-mending. The heaps of stones which old men in the parish uniform have been assiduously cracking all the year are now spread pell-mell over the roads, to be beaten down and made smooth by the more or less delicate hoofs of horses of every degree. Anything is better than mud, and it is possible to get along if but slowly, over a newly macadamised road.

Macadam himself, indeed, would be justly indignant at hearing his name applied to such a heterogeneous collection of sharp stones. It was one of his maxims that no stone should be put upon a road, if that stone were too big to be popped into a man's mouth; but, though Gargantuan mouths may be met with sometimes, there are stones on our road that would be more than a mouthful for the biggest of them. And here the steam-roller is rarely at hand to reduce the rough stones into order.

In contrast with our rough-and-ready system of public roads we may take a glance at the Roman method, that left behind it roads which are in many cases still in existence, and which, in other instances, were destroyed, not by wear and tear—for with ordinary repairs these roads are imperishable—but of malice aforethought, for the sake of the excellent gravel and other materials they contained. There was a simple uniformity about the Roman method which gave excellent results, although, in the absence of any detailed survey of the country—the roads were necessarily carried out with a too rigid directness. The workmen employed were the legionaries and the people of the country, who grumbled and complained much of the compulsory service. The overseers were the centurions and sub-officers of the legion, with no instruments, save their own arms and legs—no theodolites, no levels, but just a rod for measuring and a chain to mark a line.

First, the width of the road was paced out, either twelve or twenty-four paces, according to the importance of the thoroughfare, and the direction fixed by a line of soldiers at intervals, dressed with military precision. Then a plough was borrowed from a neighbouring field, and a furrow traced on each side of the proposed road. Between these furrows the top soil was removed till a smooth and firm foundation was obtained. Over this was spread a thin layer of rough cement, in which were laid large flat stones, placed one upon the other for the space of ten inches, and joined together with cement intimately and firmly. The cement employed owed its excellence to the method in which it was mixed, the lime being thoroughly mingled with pounded tile and brick, and not slaked till just before it was wanted for use; and it presently hardened into a solid mass more durable than the stone which it united. Over this solid foundation was laid a second course of broken stones about the diameter of the palm of the hand; with these were mixed

broken pots, tiles, and bricks, which aided to bind and make solid the mass. Upon this was placed a layer of sand and chalk, and over all a coating of six inches of gravel. The whole construction was three feet in thickness, and defined like our modern roads by granite kerbs with drains and culverts, and nearly always with a raised causeway at the side for foot passengers. The streams that might be met with were generally crossed by a ford, the bed of the stream being carefully widened and paved, a device which has given a name to the many Stratfords that are to be found in the "Gazetteer" of the present day. Where the road ran through low-lying land it was generally raised on an embankment; and, as the Roman roads were for many centuries after the Norman Conquest the chief means of communication, this feature of theirs probably caused them to be known as the high street, or more formally the King's high street or the King's highway.

But there are many existing roads which owe their origin to a period long before the Roman invasion; trackways which were never adopted into the Roman itineraries, and which are known by various local names as port-ways, salt-ways, and so on; others have survived in the form of bridle-roads; while of the innumerable footpaths that intersect the fields, passing from one little settlement to another, most are of an antiquity far beyond the present system of land tenure.

The earliest road-book that has been preserved to the present day is a Roman itinerary, designed evidently for the use of military officers, giving the routes and distances from one military station to another, over most parts of the Roman empire, including Britain. From internal evidence it is pretty certain that this itinerary was compiled in the reign of the Emperor Antoninus Pius, and thus the name generally applied to it is Antonine's Itinerary. This gives us the route from the Roman wall in Cumberland to the coast of Kent, as well as the ways between many important towns, and is the main source of our knowledge of the localities of Roman Britain.

Another valuable guide is in the form of a map or tablet, containing in a compressed and conventional form a chart of the various roads of the empire branching out from Rome; but, unfortunately, giving but few details as to the roads of Britain. The archaeologists of the last century were much excited by the alleged discovery among

certain Danish archives of a veritable guide to the whole of Britain, apparently compiled by a mediæval monk, one Richard of Cirencester, from a Roman original, and showing roads and stations all over Britain, hitherto unknown or only guessed at. But modern criticism has demolished Richard of Cirencester, at least that part of him which concerns Roman topography, and has stigmatised his treatise as a forgery cleverly constructed by its alleged discoverer, one Bertram. With the collapse of Richard many laborious and learned treatises, founded upon his topography, fell to pieces, such as those of Dr. Whitaker of Manchester, of whom De Quincey says that he wrote his histories entirely in the subjunctive mood.

Anyhow the dim light we have upon the roads of Roman Britain, falls into almost total darkness during many following ages. The purely military roads no doubt fell into disuse during the Saxon domination, and only the four great thoroughfares of the kingdom had any national care bestowed upon them. But these, and especially Watling Street, the great highway from north to south, were kept in some kind of repair. There were waywardens even in those days, and the bridges the Romans had built were probably kept in repair. For while the devout Saxons exempted ecclesiastical lands from ordinary taxation, there were three services from which even Churchmen could not escape—the *trinoda necessitas*, as it was called by the legist of the period—that is, building forts, repairing bridges, and supplying men for the national army. Some kind of protection, too, was afforded for wayfarers; lands were held on the condition of affording armed men to guard the way; while under the laws of Edward the Confessor, the King's peace extended over the great highways, and the blood money of a man killed on the highway was proportionately raised. Sometimes a powerful Abbot would take the roads adjoining his monastery under his charge, sometimes a municipal town would be charged with the guardianship of the King's highway. This was the case at Nottingham, where the town had charge of the road as well as the river, and where any who ploughed or dug a ditch within two perches of the King's highway forfeited eight pounds to the King. There are similar penalties to be found in the ancient laws of Wales, which are equally derived, no doubt, from the Roman municipal jurisprudence.

Then, with the advent of the Normans, more attention was paid to the roads of the kingdom, the conquerors' laws directing that each hundred shall have its waywardens, who should be responsible for the safety of wayfarers. But it is not till the year A.D. 1285 that any distinct enactment is found as to the care of the roads themselves, and then it is only to enjoin the lords of the soil to enlarge the ways where bushes, woods, or ditches encroach upon the highways, in order to prevent robberies. Indeed, as long as travelling on horseback and the conveyance of goods on pack animals prevailed, the public necessity for well-metalled roads was not evident. With wide open spaces of unenclosed lands, it was more pleasant and easy to amble over the turf than to pound along a hard road; and indeed, it is not till great people begin to ride in coaches that we find the governing power busying itself about the roads.

Possibly we owe the beginning of our highway legislation to the haughty indolence of Philip of Spain, who preferred to loll in a gilt coach rather than take to the saddle. Anyway, it was soon after the Spanish marriage that the first general law as to highways appears in the statute book. This enacts that two surveyors shall be chosen in each parish, and that the inhabitants shall provide labourers, carriages, tools, etc., for four days in each year to work upon the roads under the direction of the surveyor.

That this enactment was received without much opposition shows pretty clearly that it imposed no more than people were already accustomed to. In fact, the system of forced labour on the roads had been in use from the days of Roman legislation. But it is doubtful whether any good effect was produced upon the roads. In fact, for the couple of centuries immediately following this enactment, the roads were never probably in worse condition.

At the same time there was a general and not unnatural feeling in country parishes that those who used the roads—the great people going to and fro, the courtiers, the couriers, and the merchants—ought to bear the burden of repairing them. And this feeling in time found expression in legislation. In the time of Charles the Second, restrictions were laid on the weight of carriages and their contents by limiting the number of cattle by which they might be drawn; power was given to raise an assessment for the repairs



of the roads; and the plan of imposing tolls began to be adopted.

From this time we begin to hear of Turnpike, and as time went on, Turnpike Acts were passed, and turnpike roads began to be talked about. With increased traffic and better roads the stage waggon replaced the packhorse in the conveyance of merchandise—the huge tilted-waggon that survived till railway times, with its six or eight sleek horses, the smart waggoner riding his cob by the side of it, flourishing his long cart-whip, as the road wound through undulating ground with cornfields and pastures, still mostly unenclosed, and by-ways branching off with way-posts, at the junction pointing to some village whose spire shows over the hillside.

In the year 1767 the system of collecting tolls was extended to the great roads in all directions, and the customary statute labour was appropriated entirely to the cross, or country roads. This date marks the beginning of the era of stage-coaches, and the full development of an organised system of posting from stage to stage along the public roads. From this time the roads of England began to rouse the wonder and envy of other nations. In France especially, just before the revolutionary era, the roads were execrable, and the few public conveyances clumsy and badly horsed. Everything had to give way to the equipages of the grand seigneurs, and the starving peasantry were dragged from their sloppy fields to draw the gilded coach of the Marquis or Count out of the quagmires of the public road.

At the present time the public highways of France are, in management and order, greatly superior to our own, but at that date they were at least a century behind; and this although most of our improved modes of locomotion had been originally adopted from French models. The coach, however, seems to have come to us from the steppes—its model, the light waggon such as even now conveys the traveller in most parts of Russia. Herberstein, writing in the sixteenth century, speaks of coaches under the name of "cotchien," or "kolyshi wägnen," and adds: "They are so called after a village ten miles distant from Buda, Kotsee, Kotch, now Kitser. They are drawn by three horses abreast; they carry four persons along with the driver; and it is indeed a very agreeable conveyance, so that anyone can convey his bedclothes, eatables, and drinkables, and other conveniences, provided the load be not a heavy one."

The modern coach, however, retains no characteristic of its presumed model, the cotch waggon, except the central pole, which, in all properly constructed coaches, unites the framework of the two pairs of wheels, and gives stability to the whole structure.

And yet, efficient as were our roads in the old coaching days, the system of their management was a thing of shreds and patches, controlled here by local authorities, there by turnpike trustees, under the authority of a complicated network of Acts of Parliament. But the era of the coach-and-four corresponded with a period of great energy and capacity among the country gentry. The Pitts, and statesmen of their school, almost created the landed gentry as an active and overpowering element; and the Justice Shallow, of Shakespeare's time—and long after—was transformed into a keen and able local administrator, with a shrewd notion of his own class interests, but also with a strong feeling of loyal devotion to the State. His younger sons went abroad, and helped to win our Indian and Colonial Empire; the Squire himself, and the young heir, stopped at home to rule the Bench and manage the roads.

The first blast of the railway whistle foreboded the downfall of turnpikes and stage-coaches. As soon as a line of railway was completed the coaches were at once withdrawn; posting almost ceased; the great ways were deserted; the toll-gates rusted on their hinges. Often enough money had been borrowed for the making or improvement of the turnpike roads; the interest remained unpaid, or was only partly paid. There was no surplus anyhow for the repair of the roads, which fell into a bad condition all over the country. At the same time the high tolls and heavy license duties which had been borne with difficulty when the world in general travelled by road, now proved almost prohibitory of the minor public conveyances from town to town. It had been otherwise in the coaching days. Little Peddington had its daily coach to Slowcombe Minor; and if the enterprise did not bring wealth to its proprietors, it paid expenses and proved a public convenience. Soon it was found that no public conveyance was possible, except to the nearest railway station. And thus it is to the present day, although tolls are now fast disappearing, and most of the fiscal duties have been modified.

The turnpike system has lasted long after the life was fairly out of it, and as yet no efficient control of the highways has been effected. The liability of a parish to keep its roads in repair is ruefully accepted by those concerned; and, by 25 and 26 Vict., magistrates in Quarter Sessions were empowered to form highway districts of an aggregation of parishes, rural and urban; and generally throughout the country these districts have been formed, with surveyors and a governing board for each district. But each wheel of the machine is independent of the other, and the general result is that the state of the roads, all over the country, is as various and uncertain as can well be imagined.

A new interest has now been brought to the question by the growth of the wheel-world. The bicycle and the tricycle now penetrate to every corner of the land; and upon the state of the roads depends the well-being of every tourist on wheels. There are consuls and vice-consuls in every direction who are appointed by the great touring club, and who make it unpleasant sometimes for the lagging highwayman. The old-fashioned agriculturist has naturally little sympathy with these new invaders of his seclusion. "Why should the likes of we pay highway rates for the likes of them runaway wheel gentry?" asks Farmer Hodge, as he listens imperturbably to the bell and whistle of the cyclist who is trying to get past his broad-wheeled waggon.

It may be worth while to cross the Channel, and see how our near neighbours deal with their public roads. There we shall find the neat and complete organisation characteristic of the nation. The roads are all classed according to their degree—national roads, which are at the charge of the State; departmental roads, which are borne upon the budgets of the departments; and vicinal ways, which are kept up at the charge of the commune or township. The classification is almost identical with that of Imperial Rome, and was no doubt purposely so modelled. The whole of the roads, of whatever degree, are under the management of the Department of Ponts et Chaussées.

A most familiar figure on the French roads is the "cantonnier," who, like the plate-layer on an English railway, is charged with keeping in repair a certain limited stretch of roads. On his own strip of road the cantonnier is constantly at work, whenever the weather permits, and, as he is paid only for the hours he works, he makes as

much fair weather as possible. Frequently he is an old soldier, and one recalls that taking picture, "My Old Regiment," where the cantonnier, quitting his stone-breaking for a moment, salutes the standard of the dragoons, his old comrades, who are filing over the little bridge. The cantonnier is but poorly paid, and rarely makes his two francs a day, but he has probably a cottage close by with a "cour," a saving wife, with no family but her chickens and her goat, or perhaps even a cow. Always where the cantonnier is at work you see his iron stake driven into the ground with a little tin box hanging from it, which contains his documents, his schedule of work, and so on, which will be presently viséd by his immediate superior, the "agent voyer," who is constantly on the move throughout his district, with his own documents always ready to be viséd by somebody else.

With all this care and supervision, the roads of France are in a state of general and uniform efficiency. Many of the great roads were laid out under the decrees of the First Napoleon; but, during the Restoration and the reign of the Citizen King, the roads were a good deal neglected. During the Second Empire, on the contrary, great improvements were made in the roads all over the country. The main strength of Imperialism was among the peasants and small cultivators, who were quite alive to the importance of good roads, and were not ungrateful when public money was spent in making them. And if small farming is to flourish, and local markets to be supplied, good roads are as indispensable here as there.

## VICTIMS.

By THEO GIFT.

*Author of "Lil Lorimer," "An Alibi and its Price," Etc., Etc.*

### CHAPTER XX.—MENHIR DAHUT.

It was a fine breezy afternoon in the early part of April, when a young Englishman—an artist apparently, for he carried a sketching-block and paint-box suspended by a strap round his shoulders—set out to walk from a little village in the west of Brittany. He had left his vehicle at the one small hostelry which the hamlet boasted, and, declining the offer of a guide, had asked his way to one of the sights of the neighbourhood, a menhir, some two or three miles distant, which, from its lofty stature and its position on the highest part

of an open heath, served as a landmark to vessels far out at sea.

His way brought him at last to one of the Calvays so common in these parts, which was placed at a bend in the lane just where the latter forked into three, making him doubtful which of the narrow, devious paths to pursue. A woman was kneeling at prayer in the road beneath it, and the young man lifted his hat, and stood reverently aside till she had finished, his eyes wandering from the tall, black, wooden cross, with its solemn, pathetic burden reared high above the delicate green flutter of half-formed leaves and clusters of snowy blackthorn in the hedge-row behind, to the homely, white-capped figure with its string of beads trickling rapidly through the brown, hard fingers; and the pair of goats, presumably her property, who were slaking their thirst at a tiny stream which gushed out of the steep, primrose-studded bank, and ran away in a succession of miniature, glittering pools across the lane below.

Presently the woman, having finished her prayers, or becoming aware of the stranger's observation, rose up, putting her beads into the pocket of her blue linen apron, and the young man came forward and asked her his way. He spoke very bad French, with a strong English accent, and she, as it appeared, spoke no French at all, nothing but her native Breton; but by dint of frequent repetitions of the words "Menhir-Dahut," and much expenditure of finger-pointing, they arrived at last at a knowledge of each other's meaning, and, having received his directions, the traveller set off again at a brisker step than before.

It was a longer walk than he had anticipated; the deep, stony lanes, with their high banks bossed with gnarled tree-roots and crowned with dainty fringing of budding green, seemed to him interminable. Now and then there was a break, an open patch, a stretch of barren heath relieved by an occasional tall fir-tree; a tiny hamlet to this side or that, some score or less of grey, weather-stained cottages with an old church crumbling into ruin; and all about a flutter of rosy almond-blossoms, of swaying daffodils, and the gurgling of hidden streams crossed by mossy stones and overhung by slender, golden-budded palms glittering in the cool sunlight. Everywhere, on every bit of rising ground, through every break in the hedgerows, the sea was visible, a misty stripe beyond a wide stretch of flat, desolate country, broken now and then by

the tawny glimmer of a salt marsh, or by an occasional group of those strange, prehistoric monoliths, the menhirs so characteristic of this part of Brittany, looking at this distance like fossil human beings of gigantic size holding converse together.

Of actual living specimens of humanity the young man saw very few anywhere, and these seemed a stern, sombre-looking race: the men—with their wild-looking eyes and straight, dark hair floating over their shoulders, their enormous black hats and many-buttoned jackets—having a curious air of half-savage mediævalism about them; while the women seemed mere beasts of burden, brown-skinned, patient creatures, labouring with stiff, bent shoulders over hoe or spade in the newly-ploughed fields, or wheeling heavy barrows of turf or manure along the deeply-rutted roads.

Very soon, however, the stranger left even these primitive specimens of civilisation behind, and emerged on to a wide expanse of heath, brown and naked-looking, broken only by a few scattered fir-trees or a clump of lichen-crusts on rare intervals, but enamelled at this season with minute spring blossoms and emerald mosses, joyous with the song of larks, and sweet with the strong salt breeze which swept over it from that wide bay beyond the lower level of land of which the black rocks of Pen'marche form one distant point.

Here at last, right in front of him, as it seemed, rose the object of which he was in search—a tall, upright monolith of grey stone, twenty feet high at least, outlined as sharply against the pale-blue sky as in that time, hundreds of years ago, when the hands which placed it there and which crumbled into dust long before the age of history began, first chiselled its sides into rough angles and scored grotesque patterns over its dusky face. At its feet, broken into three huge fragments, lay a second menhir, partly bedded in the turf and partly heaped together so as to form a sort of natural penthouse. All around, to right, to left, and behind him, the heath stretched away in long, rolling undulations bare and barren enough, save for its brief covering of thin spring greenness, and for the clumps of ragged furze bushes spotted here and there with sparse gold blossoms. In front it took a downward slope, giving to view not only the low-lying line of flat coast-land beyond, but beyond that again a vast semi-circular space of vague, shimmery



ocean, blue as the sky above it, cleft at one extremity by the ragged, ink-black rocks of the point, or "torche," of Pen'marche, against whose cruel jaws the waves, even at this distance, could be seen rearing themselves in cataracts of cream-white foam; and dotted on the far horizon by the islands of Karek-hir and La Charette, glittering like sparks of fire in the low sunlight.

A grand view in its breadth and loneliness; but either the traveller was disappointed in it, or he had come in search of something else but the picturesque after all; for after one hasty glance at it, and scarcely even that at the great menhir, to reach which, when he first caught sight of it, he had redoubled his pace, he turned his back on both, and devoted himself to eagerly scanning the undulating ridges of heath in one direction with an expression of anxious impatience which changed, however, to one of positively radiant delight, when suddenly two figures rose above the crest of the rising ground some couple of hundred yards distant, and came slowly towards him in the track of the westering sun.

They were those of a young woman and a boy, the latter dressed in ordinary peasant costume and carrying a thick stick in his hand; the former wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat with a curling feather, and wrapped in a long fur-lined cloak, which she held closely round her as if for warmth. It fell from her hands, however, and the ends were swept backwards by the strong breeze as she caught sight of the solitary male figure standing in the shadow of the great menhir; and in the same moment the boy also pointed to it, saying something to her which she answered in a way that had the effect of making him stop short and seat himself on a jutting fragment of rock, from which he had a good view of the country around. She herself made no stop, however, beyond that first, half involuntary one; but went forward, slowly at first, and then more swiftly, and in another moment was clasped and held in the grip of two strong arms, while, between the kisses which he fairly rained upon her white, agitated face, Marstland—for it was he, and no artist—almost sobbed out:

"My Vera, my poor, poor little darling! At last!"

Vera did not make any reply. Perhaps she had not expected so passionate a greeting, and was frightened by it, for she trembled excessively, and the face which lay on

his breast was so deadly pale that he thought she was going to faint; but she made no effort to repel him or free herself, and only after a minute or so gave utterance to a long sighing, "Oh! oh!" so expressive of past pain and trouble, and present half-fearful relief, that it brought tears into her lover's eyes.

In truth she was greatly altered since he had last seen her; altered even since that visit to the Convent of the Augustinians at Quimper only six weeks previously. It had been a sad and troubled face which greeted the sisters then, unduly pale for one so young, and quite devoid of that sweet, and almost expressionless tranquillity which till lately had been its chief characteristic; but now the pallor was ghastly with a dull red spot in the centre of each cheek, while the soft curves of the latter and of the round chin had sharpened visibly, and the pupils of the large gray eyes were dilated with a piteous expression, half hopelessness, half desperation, which went to Marstland's heart, and made him hold her closer still with almost incoherent words of tenderness and caressing.

"My poor, poor little darling!" he kept saying pitifully, "how you have suffered, and—Heaven forgive me!—for me, for your truth to me! Oh, Vera, I never loved you so much as at this moment; and yet, when I see what my love has brought on you, I could almost wish for your sake we had never met."

"Do you? Ah! so do I sometimes; but—not now," said Vera simply. She had recovered composure enough to draw herself a little away, so that, though his arms were still round her, she could stand alone and look up at him; but that only made the weary sadness of her face more apparent, and she did not resist when her lover took off his great-coat, and folding it into a cushion for her, made her sit down on the soft turf under the lee of the fallen menhir, and lean against him while they talked. "It did not seem possible that I should find you here," she said softly. "It has been getting more and more hopeless every day of late, so that I sometimes thought all your planning and trouble would be no use; but now that you have come—oh! it is quite different now. Perhaps you will save me after all."

"Of course I have come, and of course I shall save you," Marstland said, the deep, strong tones of his voice contrasting strangely with those feeble, fluttering ones, scarcely more than a whisper, in which



Vera spoke. "Did you doubt me, love, that you were not sure of that? Didn't you know that my only reason for not trying to see you sooner, to write oftener, was the fear of bringing fresh peril and trouble on you; that, except for the form of running over to Guernsey for a day or so now and again to visit the lodgings I took there more than a fortnight ago, I have never been further from you than Quimper or Morlaix; and when I left the island yesterday evening, after making all the final preparations for our marriage, I told my landlady to make her rooms extra bright and neat for the day after to-morrow, as when I next returned to them I should bring my wife with me. She will not be sorry to find herself there, my little wife, will she, Vera?"

For a minute Vera did not answer. She did not even blush; only looked up at him with an expression of almost awed wonder and admiration; but after an instant this was quenched in the frightened, crushed look, which seemed to have settled like a mask on her young features, and she said very low and fearfully:

"They say that we are all to start for Paris the day after to-morrow, in order that we may keep my birthday there."

"I know," said Marstland smiling, "only unfortunately I mean you to keep it with me instead. It is disagreeable that they should have taken up the other idea, and so obliged us to hurry matters; for of course I should have liked to have waited till the day on which you do become of 'full age,' as I have already described you; but it is their fault for driving us to it, and you will have your birthday present of a plain gold ring a day before the anniversary, that's all. Let me try it on now, my darling one, and see if it fits."

He took it out of his waistcoat pocket as he spoke, keeping one arm round her the while, his face full of colour, fire, and excitement; but no answering blush came to Vera's cheek. All the sweet pink roses which used to flush face and throat at the slightest provocation seemed to have faded with her now, and she only said in the same low, tremulous tone:

"They will find out, and come after us."

"As they please," Marstland answered sternly. "It will be a shorter journey for them than it would be if they were to follow us to England, should they feel disposed to take so much trouble for the sake of bringing you their forgiveness; and it will be no use their coming for anything

else. You will belong to me then, and, once that is the case, no one shall ever be allowed to say a harsh word to you again. Be sure of that!"

"But if they—if they take me away!" Vera whispered, her lips paling with the words.

"My own love! how can they? They suspect nothing at present, or you would not be here now; and, unless anything unforeseen were to happen, I have made all my plans far too carefully to be thwarted. Bénéto tells me that it will not be difficult for you to leave your room unheard, that it is at some distance from your parents' apartments, and that she will be waiting for you outside the garden door, which is never fastened. I wanted to be there, but she would not let me. She said the dogs would be sure to make a noise, and of course we must run no useless risks; but I shall be ready for you in the lane at the bottom of the orchard with a strong, light carriage, and one of the best horses to be had for love or money in the neighbourhood. We will drive to Quimper, catch the early morning express there for Morlaix, and once there we shall be met by my friend's steam yacht, which will take us across to Guernsey quicker than any one else would be likely to follow us, even if they started only five minutes later. After that, you know, there is nothing more for us to do but to walk up to the church and be married! It will be in the afternoon, but I have made all the needful arrangements for that; fortunately afternoon and evening marriages are too common there for one to excite any notice, and it will be no use for any one to follow us then. You will be my wife, and no one can take you from me; and if your mother is a religious woman, if they either of them have any care for your good name, I shouldn't think they would wish to do so. You will be safe enough, my precious one, if you are only willing to do the one thing that will make you so—an immensely great thing, but I have no choice save to ask it of you—to trust yourself to me."

"Leah said I might trust you," Vera answered simply, "and unless you take me away—you make it all seem easy when you speak; but at other times when I think how strong they are, it does not seem possible; and then——"

"There is no 'then,' Vera," said Marstland, putting additional firmness into his voice, so as to reassure her. "You have only to believe that, to rest your faith in

me—before Heaven you may, my child—as entirely as though, till the moment when we stand together at the altar I were your father or your brother; and it will be easy. I have taken every pains to make it so.”

Vera looked up suddenly.

“Will Leah be there?” she asked.

“Once—in London—she promised that, when the time came, she would be my bridesmaid; that she would be—there with me. I thought perhaps,”—her lips quivering a little—“that she would have managed to go over to Guernsey too.”

“With me?” asked Marstland laughing. “My own darling! even on the score of propriety alone, I’m afraid that would be hardly possible.”

“But, if it is proper for me to go with you—and she said she could trust you, too?”

“Only you see you are going to be my wife, and she is not. No, no, you innocent child, a man does not bring one young lady to help him to run away with another; and, as it happens, Leah doesn’t even know what is taking place, or that I am not in London at the present moment.”

“Leah doesn’t know!” Vera repeated, a look of such dismay coming into her face, that he regretted having spoken. “Oh! I thought—I made sure you would have told her—that it was she who was advising you. I thought if she felt sure it would be safe——” She stopped short, the tears rushing into her eyes, and Marstland, bitterly annoyed with himself, drew her closer to him and tried his best to soothe her.

“My dear love, it will be safe for you. It does not need Leah’s assurance to make it so; though you would certainly have that too if you could ask her. My only reason for not telling her of our plans was that we agreed, you know, to keep them a profound secret, and I could scarcely have made her an exception to the rule without doing so by the Professor also. You know what friends she and her father are in every sense of the word.”

“But when I begged you to keep it a secret, I said, ‘except from the Josephses,’” Vera answered. “And the Professor was always so kind, he might even have helped you.”

“No; he would not have done that,” said Marstland, frowning a little. “He is kind—I don’t want to prejudice you against him, Vera—but in this matter he has not been so kind as he might have

been. It was he who would not let Leah write to you after she got your mother’s letter; and he seemed inclined to make a jest of the affair—not to believe that our affection for each other was as deep as it is. The fact is, he’s an excellent old fellow, but just a little narrow-minded and worldly-wise, as old fellows are apt to be; and I expect he thought it was the proper thing for one paternal authority to appear to support another.”

“Ah! he too thinks it wrong to go against one’s parents, then,” said Vera, so sadly that Marstland wished more than ever that the Josephses’ name had not come up.

“Not when parents are cruel and tyrannical enough to want to force one into wrong-doing themselves,” he answered briskly. “Why, Vera, think for yourself how differently he treats his children! what perfect liberty they enjoy! Why, I don’t believe he had even spoken to little Lucas till Naomi came home from a dance one day and said she was engaged to him; and I am quite sure he, and Leah, and the whole family will be only too glad to hear that we are married. Indeed, he said himself that he should be the first to come and see you when you were my wife.”

“Did he really?”

Vera looked a little reassured, and a faint tinge of colour came back to her cheek.

“Of course he did; and we’ll telegraph to them the moment the ceremony is over, so that you may have their congratulations as soon as may be. I will write to your parents, too, and tell them that you are safe, and well, and married to me, so that they will not be dragging the ponds for you at any rate. I will even ask their forgiveness for you, if it will please you, love; though, when I look at your sweet face, and see what they have been making you suffer, I can’t promise to forgive them.”

Vera looked up at him with the same mixture of awed admiration and wonder as before.

“You speak as if I—as if I belonged to you already,” she said innocently; “but you forget I do belong to them still. I am their child, you know; and I suppose it is natural that papa—the Count lent him money, you know—that he should expect me to help him to show his gratitude this way, since he wishes it. I might even have done it—I don’t know—if I had never met you, or if you had not kept on caring for me; but now—now that I see

you again—I feel that I could not. I never could. Even the convent would be better.”

“And, now that you have seen me, Vera, it shall be neither the Count nor the convent,” said Marstland, kissing her, “though our scraps of letters have been so scrappy that I don’t yet know how you can have got involved in this way; still less what can have ripened the idea of this iniquitous marriage so suddenly, or induced you to write me that dreadful little note, which I think I may destroy now, though the reading it nearly drove me mad at the time.” And he took out of his pocket a folded sheet of paper and spread it before her. It was so blotted that you could scarcely read the words as they ran.

“DEAR GEORGE,

“This is only to say good-bye. It is no, no use! The Count has come back, and they are going to make me marry him in a month. I have tried all I can, but they will not listen. They make it seem as if I were something wicked; as if I had promised! But I never did promise; only I am so weak, I don’t how to resist. Oh, forgive me! Indeed I love you. I have loved you all along. I hope I shall die soon.

“Your loving  
“VERA.”

Vera blushed deeply.

“I think I should have died,” she said; “I felt so wretched, so helpless, and you and Leah were so far away. Ah, you don’t know what it is to have no one near you; to be all alone against everybody. One could be made to do anything. And I had been thinking (he was away so long, you know) that it might all pass over; that perhaps he would forget me, or find someone else. It was his sisters who gave me the first fright.”

“His sisters! How?”

“They were staying at a convent in Quimper, and they came over one day to see us without warning. They were very kind, very nice; but they talked as if it were all settled; as if I were engaged to their brother. And the next day, when I was sent to visit them and their aunt, the Mother Superior at the convent, it was the same thing. She—the Mère Supérieure—even gave me little counsels about my duty as a Christian wife, and presented me with a religious book, which she begged me to study for the good of my soul. I did not

take it. I told her mamma did not allow me to read those sorts of things—Popish books, you know—but I think they saw there was something else, that I was very unhappy. Perhaps they told him. Anyhow, it was only three days later that papa said to me: ‘Well, little one, I congratulate you. That scoundrel who murdered our good friend’s steward is to be sent to the galleys, it seems, and de Mailly announces that he is free at last to put his business on one side, and come back to Finisterre to prepare for his marriage with my daughter. What about the trousseau, eh? It is to be hoped it will not take long; for this fiancé of thine has grown impatient, and will only give us a month at the outside.’ A month! That was all; and, when I flew to mamma, she said the same. She would not even hear me when I begged and entreated. She told me I must be mad; that it had all been settled for months; that I had consented, accepted his ring, and gone as his fiancée to visit his relations; I, who only did what I had been ordered to do, nothing more! But when I reminded mamma of that, she would not listen. She said I was wilful, and perverse, and ungrateful; that but for her I would have been married and the whole business done with months ago; and then she sent me away, and I did not see her all next day or the one after. Joanna said I had made her really ill, and wouldn’t let me go to her. It was then I began to despair, and I wrote to you. What could I do?”

Marstland drew her nearer to him. He had not the heart to say, “You should have stood out firmly and from the beginning, or not at all. You should never have made any sham of yielding or submission, unless you had meant to do both in reality.” The words might be on his lips, but one look at the frail, drooping figure, the piteous, childish face, silenced them and every thought of criticism; and he only said very pitifully:

“My poor little love, what indeed! But, Vera, I was not long in coming to you, was I? You felt better when you got my letter?”

“Oh yes! When Bénéite put it in my hand, and I knew that you were at Locudy, it seemed as if—as if an angel had come down from heaven to free me. The Count had been calling on us that day. He brought me another ring, and he would put it on my finger and kiss my hand. I felt sick, almost suffocating. I even longed

that I might hide myself in the convent like Alphonsine; but I dared not say anything because papa was there looking at us, and all the while the Count kept close to me, and kept stooping down to stare into my face, as if—as if I were something of his already. He even said he could wish for once that he was a Protestant, so that he need not wait till after Easter week for the marriage. You know”—her voice drooping to the old terrified whisper—“it is actually fixed for Monday week now: the first possible day.”

“Yes,” said Marstland gaily, “but I also know that you will be Mrs. George Marstland long before that; and that if your Count ever comes close enough to stare at you again in the way—confound him!—that you describe, he will get a sound thrashing from your husband. Cheer up, my sweet one. You have seen your last of him now, for you tell me he is in Paris at present, and though the arrangement that you should follow him, and this infernal marriage take place from there, has obliged us to hurry our proceedings more than we wanted, I don’t know—now that I have seen you—that I am sorry for it. A few formalities, more or less, what do they matter once you are saved? And this man’s being away makes it all the easier.”

“Yes, if he had been at Mailly I could not have met you here to-day,” said Vera, shuddering. “Look there, do you see that dark line of fir-tops yonder? That is the boundary of his property. Oh! think if he had been riding across the heath from there and had seen us!”

Marstland laughed fearlessly.

“But he is in Paris, and no one, save B  noite and P’tit-Jean, who is keeping watch so virtuously there, even suspects that I am not in England!”

“Ah, no, thank heaven! B  noite says she knows it is wicked, and so she will not even tell Catharine that she has been seeing you or helping to arrange for us. She says it would disturb Catharine’s soul; but she has made up her mind that her own soul is not so important as Catharine’s body; and till you gave her so much money she was always troubled by thinking that if anything happened to her, her poor sister would have to go to the ‘asile des pauvres.’”

“And I would have given double the

money rather than lose her help,” said Marstland. “Indeed, we could have done nothing without it. Her facilities for going between us, and her sharp wits, have been invaluable. I only hope the lad yonder is equally to be depended on.”

“Oh, P’tit-Jean would do anything he was paid for,” said Vera simply. “All the Breton men are avaricious; but he is quite a little miser. He hides his money in a hole in the ground, and counts it every day. No, I do not think anyone suspects you now. It is fortunate, for I should not have liked to disobey a command of mamma’s or tell an actual falsehood; and at present I am really doing what I am told in going out for a long walk every day. Dr. Dupr   ordered it on account of my looking so thin and pale, and though I would have liked to have looked still paler and uglier if it would have made the Count dislike me, papa insisted that I should obey; and as mamma’s rheumatism will not let her walk, and Joanna hates exercise, P’tit-Jean is desired to go with me instead. But oh! I must be going back now. It is a long walk, and I dare not be late. I have stayed too long already.”

She rose to her feet with trembling haste as she spoke, and Marstland—loth as he was to let her go—was fain to own that she was right. Yet with all his heart he longed that he could carry her off then and there. He had never before realised the extent of her weakness, of her defective moral judgment, of her utter impotence for self-defence; and as he saw the little life and colour which had come into her face fade from it again when he took his supporting arm from her, he dreaded even the chances that a single day might bring, and would have given all he had that it was that night, and not the one after, which was fixed for their flight. What he could do to cheer her by the tenderest caresses, the bravest, most hopeful words, he did; but his heart sank within him none the less as, standing within the shadow of the great menhir—for she would not let him come out from it while she was in sight, lest some one at a distance should spy their two figures together—he watched the slender, girlish form wending its way, with slow steps and downbent head, across the blossoming moor and through the golden mist of the setting sunbeams.

*The Right of Translating Articles from ALL THE YEAR ROUND is reserved by the Authors.*



For Dwelling-Houses and Household Furniture.

FOUNDED  
1873.

FOR SELECT  
HOME BUSINESS  
ONLY.



Perfect Security.  
Liberal Settlements.

Policy Conditions  
Simple & Equitable.

→\* FINANCIAL POSITION. \*←

Fire Company.

Capital Subscribed.....	£263,335
Capital Paid Up.....	52,667
Annual Income.....	88,943
Funds and Investments...	98,969

Accident Company.

Capital Subscribed.....	£142,175
Capital Paid Up.....	28,435
Annual Income.....	21,264
Funds and Investments...	36,528

**BONUS POLICIES**

ARE ISSUED AT ORDINARY RATES.

BONUS POLICIES issued in 1876 and 1881 are  
being Renewed this year FREE OF COST.

→\* AGENCIES \*←

Are specially sought after and valuable, on account of the Bonus  
System. For terms apply to the Head Office or any of the Branches.

(SEE NEXT PAGE)

JAMES COLLINS & CO.  
PRINTERS,  
MANCHESTER.

For Accidents of all kinds.

For Risks of Ordinary Hazard of all kinds.

For Special Risks at Equitable Rates (without Bonus).

# The Equitable Fire and Accident Offices.

HEAD OFFICE:

11 & 13, ST. ANN STREET, MANCHESTER.

BRANCHES:

LONDON	69, LOMBARD STREET, E.C.
GLASGOW	101, ST. VINCENT STREET.
BIRMINGHAM	MIDLAND BUILDINGS, 2, NEW STREET.
LIVERPOOL	11, TITHEBARN STREET.
LEEDS	32, PARK ROW.
NEWCASTLE	1, ST. NICHOLAS BUILDINGS.
BELFAST	6, ROYAL AVENUE.
DUBLIN	18, DAME STREET.

## BONUS POLICIES

ARE ISSUED AT ORDINARY RATES.

BONUS POLICIES issued in 1876 and 1881 are being renewed this year FREE OF COST.

### AGENCIES

are specially sought after and valuable, on account of the Bonus System. For terms apply to the Head Office or any of the Branches.

### AS TO AGENCY.

*Be good enough to send information as to Terms to*

Date

Mr.

of

has lately commenced in business as

he is well connected and well thought of, and would be likely to benefit both himself and your Companies if agreeable to act as your Agent.

Recommended by

Address

Date